COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
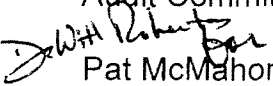**DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

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J. TYLER McCAULEY
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

May 2, 2001

TO: Audit Committee

FROM: Pat McMahon
            Assistant Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES –
            PLACEMENT ACCURACY**

As requested, we conducted a review to determine the accuracy of placement data on the Child Welfare Services / Case Management System (CWS/CMS). Specifically, we determined whether children are at the physical location indicated by CWS/CMS.

Background

CWS/CMS is California's statewide child welfare information system. Implemented in Los Angeles County in 1998, CWS/CMS provides case management and client tracking automation for most major components of child welfare services, except for eligibility determination, foster care and related payments. The major system components are Referral, Client, Case, Resource, Court, and Placement. As of December 31, 2000, there were approximately 36,000 cases with an active placement on CWS/CMS.

The Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) procedures require Children's Social Workers (CSWs) to approve the moving of a child from one caretaker/location to another caretaker/location. Section E030-2200 of the CWS/CMS Eligibility Handbook requires the system to be updated within two days of a placement or replacement. This helps ensure the Department has an accurate record of a child's location and helps ensure accurate payments to providers.

Scope and Methodology

A random sample of 30 cases was selected from each of six different placement types; group homes, foster family agencies, foster family homes, relatives, MacLaren Children's Center, and "other" (e.g., guardian homes, small family homes, medical facilities, etc.). The random sample of 180 cases reflected the physical location of the child as of January 2, 2001 per CWS/CMS.

With the Department's assistance, we attempted to contact the caretaker indicated on CWS/CMS to confirm that the child was at the physical location on January 2, 2001. If the caretaker stated that the child was no longer at the location, we attempted to determine when the child left the location. Where possible, we contacted the new caretaker to confirm that the child was there on January 2, 2001.

Results

Of the 180 cases sampled, 17 (9%) were Probation Department cases. These cases remain as open placements on CWS/CMS because DCFS maintains responsibility for paying the provider. When the Probation Department terminates placement, it is supposed to send a Placement Authorization Form to DCFS' Revenue Enhancement / Fiscal Services Division (REFSD) so the placement can be terminated on CWS/CMS.

For eight (47%) of the 17 Probation cases, the Probation Department's system showed that placement had been terminated, including seven that had been terminated more than three months prior to January 2, 2001. However, Probation either did not send the Placement Authorization Form to the REFSD, the form was lost, or the REFSD did not enter the case into CWS/CMS.

Of the 163 DCFS cases, the location data was incorrect for 21 (13%) cases. The attachment summarizes the exceptions, broken down by placement type. For 20 of these exceptions, we were able to obtain an approximate date of when the child left the location. In 11 (55%) instances, the child left the location at least three months prior to January 2, 2001, including four that left more than a year ago. For the remaining nine (45%), the child left the location less than three months prior to our review.

We provided DCFS with details of the 21 exceptions. The Department will follow-up on these exceptions to determine whether CWS/CMS is not being updated because CSWs are not initiating paperwork to update the system, whether Technical Assistants (TAs) are not inputting the information (TAs are part of the REFSD and are responsible for entering placement data on CWS/CMS), or whether the forms are being misplaced.

Although our review focused on confirming the physical location of children, we also noted several cases where other fields on CWS/CMS were either inaccurate or missing. Specifically, we noted missing or inaccurate CSW names and telephone numbers, caretaker names and telephone numbers, and agency phone numbers. Not properly updating CWS/CMS results in an inaccurate database, possible overpayments, and makes it more difficult to determine a child's location.

We met with DCFS representatives to discuss our findings and we suggested that the Department initiate the following corrective action.

1. **Remind CSWs and TAs of their responsibility for maintaining accurate placement data on CWS/CMS.**

2. Follow-up on the 21 exceptions to determine why CWS/CMS is not being updated.

3. Implement monitoring controls to ensure staff complies with existing procedures for updating CWS/CMS. These controls could include:

   a) Providing periodic reports to CSWs showing their assigned caseload, along with detailed placement data for each case. Require CSWs to review this report for accuracy and submit the necessary paperwork to their supervisor for any cases where the information needs to be updated.

   b) Conducting periodic audits of a sample of cases.

   c) Providing training to workers that consistently violate procedures.

4. Explore the feasibility of performing periodic automated matches between CWS/CMS and the Probation Department's system to identify cases that have been closed on Probation's system, but remain open on CWS/CMS.

The Department agreed to take appropriate actions to address our findings and suggestions. We appreciate the assistance provided by DCFS management and staff during our review.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at (213) 974-0301 or DeWitt Roberts at (213) 893-0973.

PTM:DR

Attachments

c: J. Tyler McCauley, Auditor-Controller
   Department of Children and Family Services
      Anita Bock, Director
      Genevra Gilden, Chief, Quality Assurance Division
   Richard Shumsky, Chief Probation Officer

CWS/CMS ACCURACY
SUMMARY OF EXCEPTIONS
DCFS CASES

	Foster Family Home	Foster Family Agency	Relative Home	Group Home	MacLaren Children's Center	Other Home	Totals
Minor ran away				2	1		3
Returned to parents				1			1
Same FFA, but different caretaker		3				2	5
Caretaker moved	2		2				4
Different caretaker		2		1	1		4
Sent to a disciplinary facility				1	1	1	3
Sent to a mental health facility					1		1
Totals	2	5	2	5	4	3	21